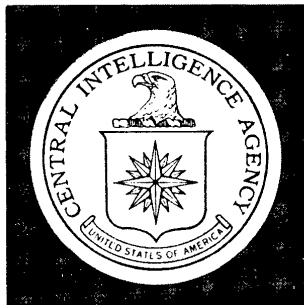


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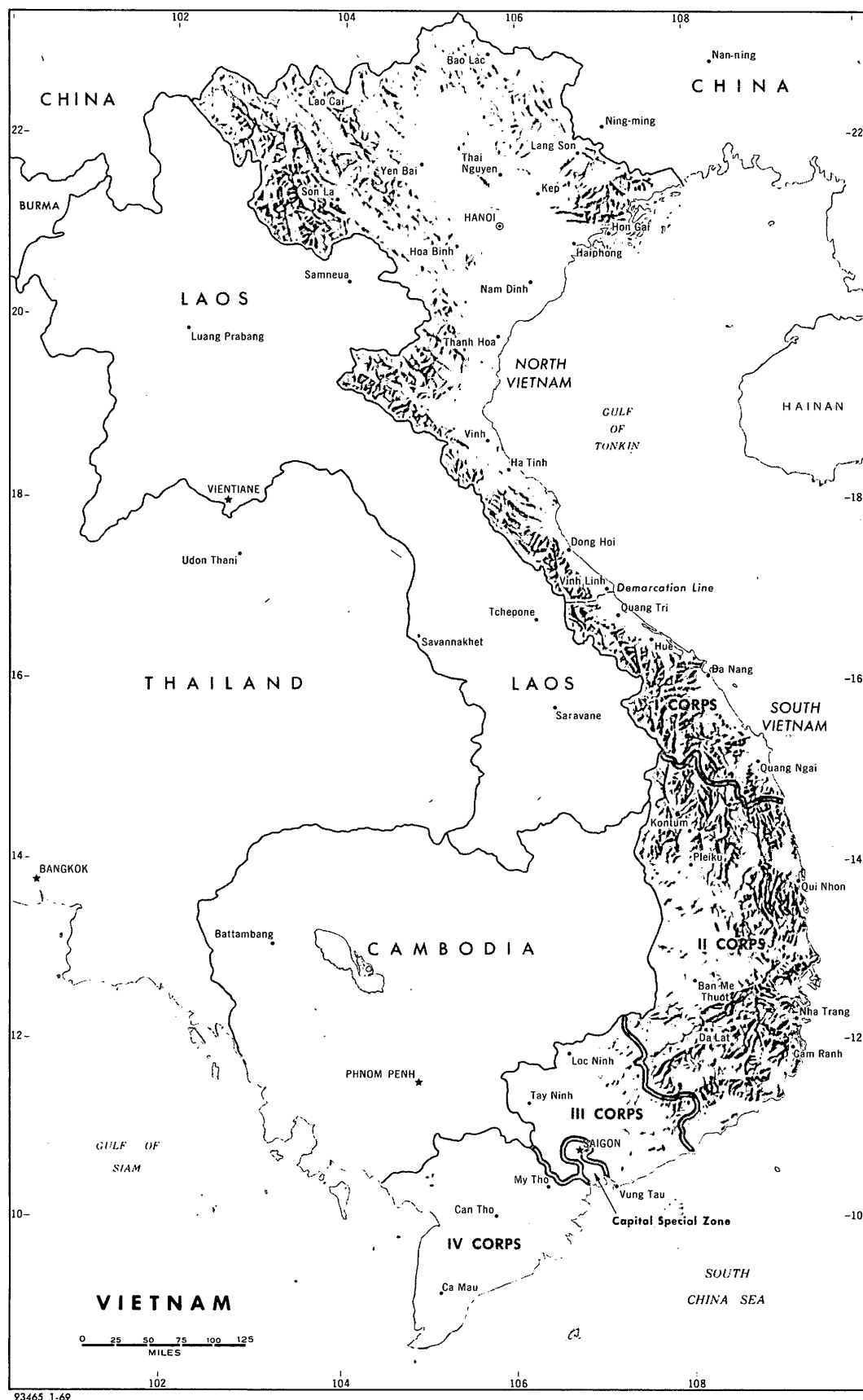


The President's Daily Brief

20 March 1969



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~~Top Secret~~



FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

21 March 1969

LATE NOTES FOR THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF OF
20 MARCH 1969

I. MAJOR PROBLEMS

VIETNAM

Communist-initiated activity in II Corps rose to the highest level since early March. Most of the incidents were indirect fire attacks against military installations.

[redacted] the increase may signal the beginning of the next phase of the offensive in II Corps.

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MIDDLE EAST

The Egyptians have reiterated to Minister Bergus that Husayn will be speaking for Nasir as well as himself during his visit to Washington. Husayn has been authorized to tell President Nixon that Nasir is "more than willing to resume relations with the US," and that it is now up to Washington to do "something." When Bergus asked if Nasir would consider that the US had done "something" if it assured the Egyptians of its support for Security Council resolution 242 on the Arab-Israeli dispute, he was answered affirmatively. [redacted]

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The Saudis have weighed in with a gloomy appraisal of the Middle East situation. They told Ambassador Eilts yesterday that Husayn's visit was the "last chance" to prevent new hostilities. [redacted]

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Jordanian Foreign Minister Rifai told Ambassador Symmes that the Jordanians and the Egyptians would be submitting their answers to Jarring's recent questions sometime between 22 and 24 March. The answers will be "essentially" positive,

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but both Amman and Cairo see a need to be "accurate and cautious" when putting something in writing and they will not be as forthright as Jordan has been orally with Jarring.



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SOVIET AFFAIRS

There is nothing significant to report.

EUROPE

There is nothing significant to report.

II. OTHER IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS

There is nothing significant to report.

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I. MAJOR PROBLEMS

VIETNAM

Evidence pointing to a new wave of enemy action throughout South Vietnam over the coming weekend continues to mount. Saturday night will mark the beginning of the second month of the Communist campaign, and the enemy may try to repeat its actions of a month ago when more than 100 incidents of shelling and ground attacks occurred.

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the enemy may launch extensive sapper activity in Saigon and Da Nang beginning this weekend.

* * *

There are tenuous indications that more North Vietnamese main force elements may move into the DMZ area. The headquarters of what is believed to be the 325th Division located in the Dong Hoi area of North Vietnam recently said in a message that it was about to move. (A North Vietnamese Division normally numbers about 8,000 men.) Two units, probably advanced elements of this division, have already been identified south of the DMZ. Another subordinate is located just north of the zone.

SOVIET AFFAIRS

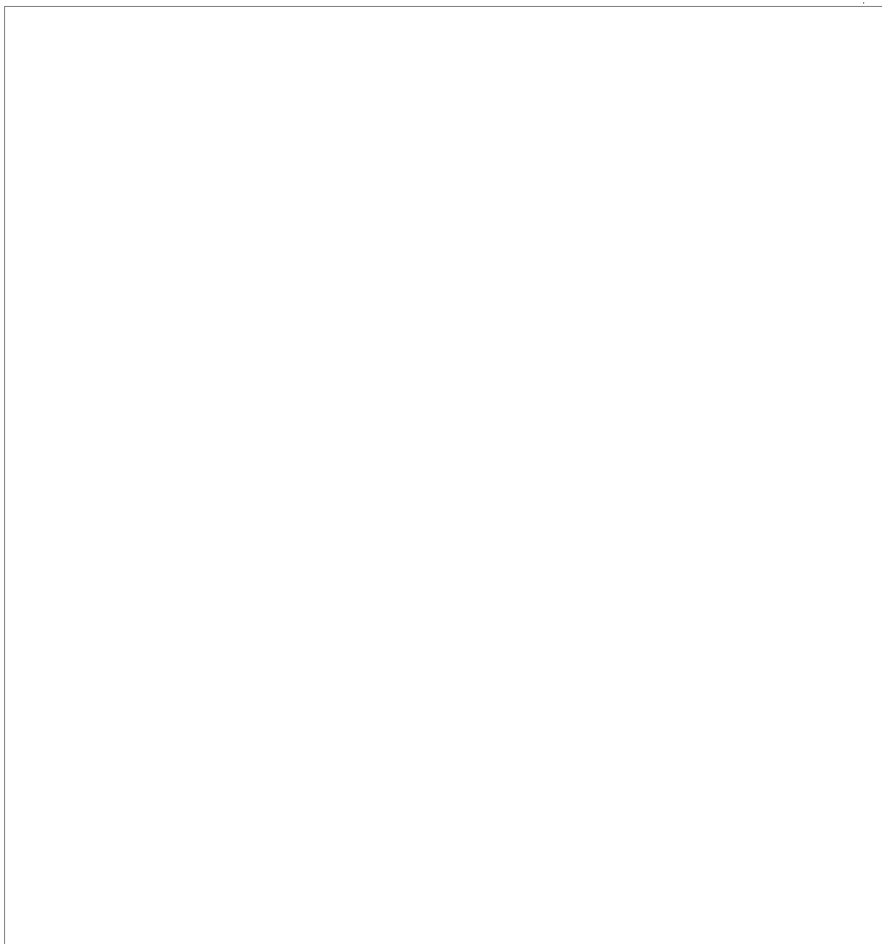
Today's issue of Pravda carries the first Soviet editorial commentary on the US decision to develop an

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ABM system. In it, the Soviet practice of carefully avoiding direct criticism of the President is continued. The article cites a cost figure of one hundred billion dollars, an obvious attempt to present the case in its most extreme form. It directs its criticism at the Pentagon, however, rather than the President. The editorial also avoids any implication that the decision will affect possible strategic arms limitation talks between the US and the USSR.

EUROPE



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MIDDLE EAST

There is nothing significant to report.

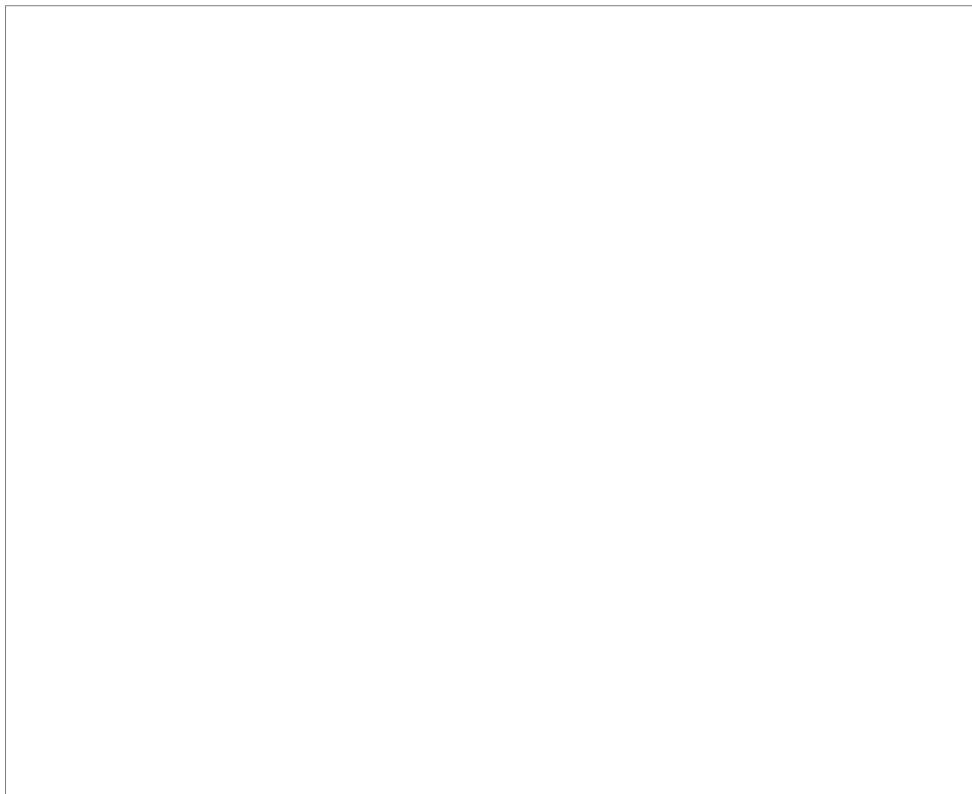
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II. OTHER IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS

THAILAND

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 Thanat, as well as other Thai leaders, believe that the time has come for Bangkok to take a hard look at post-Vietnam options to its staunchly pro-US posture. Although far from sanguine about the possibilities, the Thai fear that the US security commitment to Thailand may suffer as a result of a Vietnam settlement and that it would be prudent to act accordingly.

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PERU

Velasco's government has removed the top officers of Peru's central reserve bank and replaced them with men who

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will probably be dominated by the ministry of finance. The ousted officials were implicated in a scandal which centered around alleged illegal foreign exchange transactions by the International Petroleum Company. They had been an important moderating influence on the government, and we expect severe economic restrictions, including tighter foreign exchange controls, to follow their removal.

SOVIET UNION - COMMUNIST CHINA

Soviet newspapermen have told Embassy Moscow that an official statement on the border situation is being prepared which will express a willingness to discuss border demarcation problems and seek a solution. The sources added, however, that Moscow is determined to deal "seriously" with future "provocations" along the border.

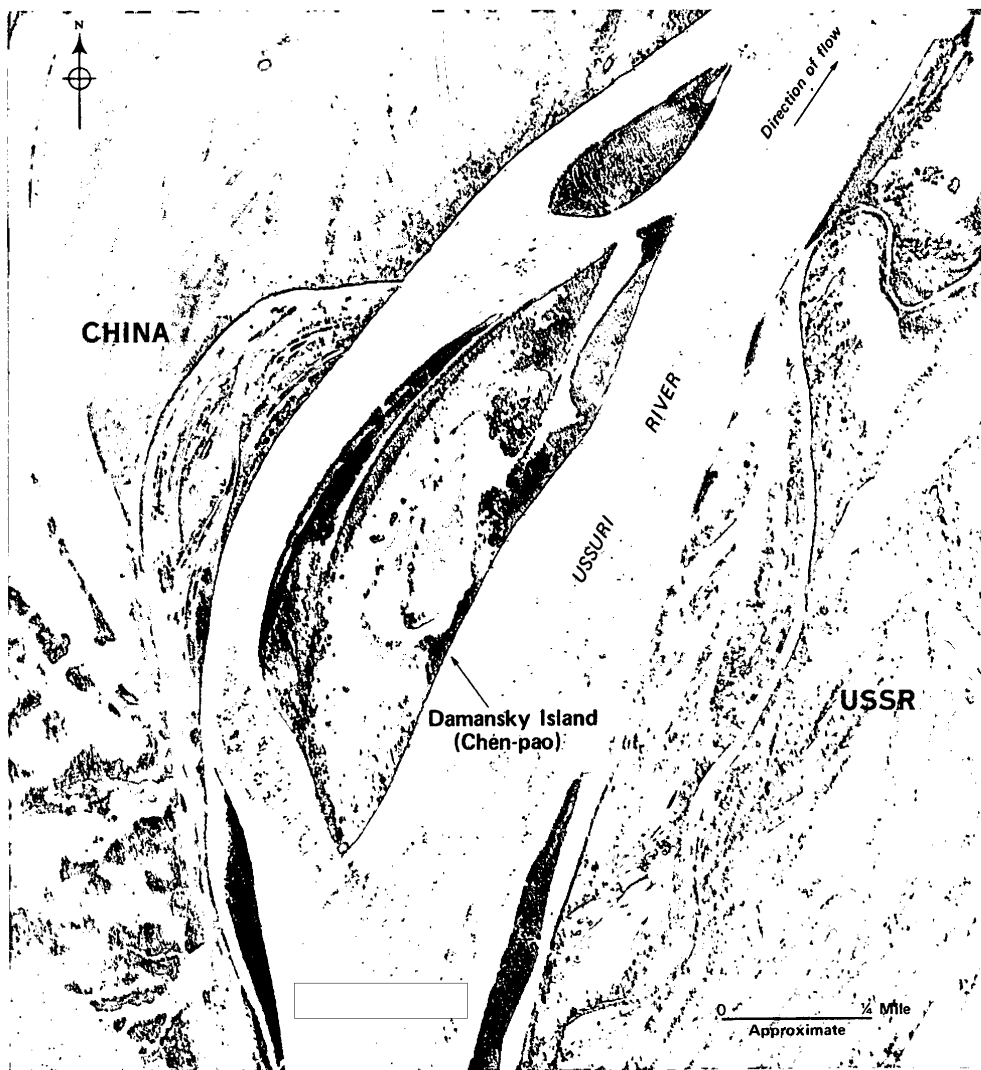
Given the present temper between the two countries, a serious dialogue on border problems seems doubtful. Discussions on border demarcation in 1964 broke down with no positive results. Both sides have blamed the other for the failure of these talks.

To back up the idea that they are leading from strength, Red Star, the Soviet army newspaper, published a front page editorial today urging Soviet troops to prepare for "the final goal, the inevitability of a rocket blow against the enemy if he encroaches on our peaceful labor."

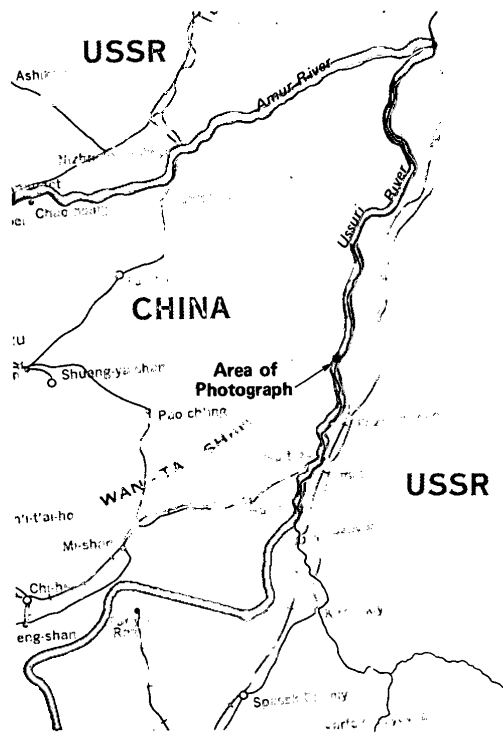
There is more background on the dispute in today's Annex.

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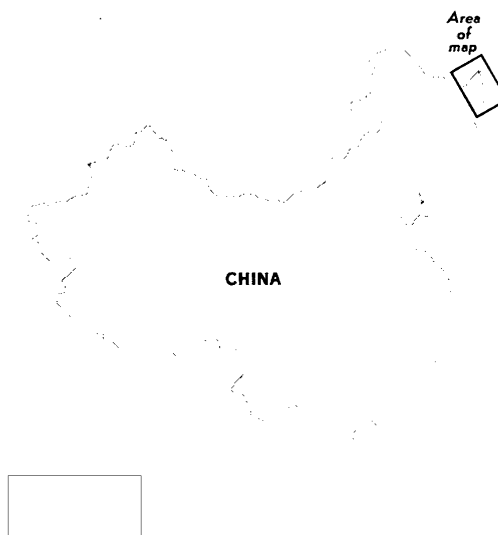
Scene of Recent Sino-Soviet Clashes



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THE SINO-SOVIET BORDER DISPUTE

Both sides report that sporadic fire fights are continuing in the vicinity of Damansky Island (called Chen Pao by the Chinese), although apparently there have been no serious clashes since last weekend. The Soviets are maintaining strong patrols on the island and our most recent satellite photography--taken on 12 March--shows the tracks of what we presume to be Soviet vehicles. 50X1

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The Soviets this month have established something approaching possession of the island, but there is still the question of legal ownership. Until 2 March both Peking and Moscow seemed content to leave this, as a practical matter, an open question. Both sides sent patrols to the island when the river was frozen, but neither sought to establish complete control or permanent positions. Now, of course, both are firmly on record as claiming sovereignty over the island and lives have been lost in support of these claims.

Of the conflicting claims, the Chinese seem to have the better argument on both legal and geographic grounds. The pertinent 19th century treaties refer only to the river as the state boundary, leaving literally hundreds of islands subject to dispute. Even if the main channel of the river

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is considered to be the boundary, constant channel shifts open the way to argument. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] the main channel runs east of the island and, therefore, if one accepts the main channel argument, the island is legally Chinese. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] A comparison of 1938 Japanese maps and recent satellite photography shows only a few changes. A small island has been formed off the northwest tip of Damansky Island and the shape of the downstream end of Damansky has been altered. (The Ussuri River runs from south to north.) The position of Damansky Island in the river has not, however, shifted perceptibly.

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Normally, Damansky is completely uninhabited and evidently supports no economic activity. The island has evolved as a result of the deposit of sedimentary materials; consequently it is low and poorly drained. Farming some 10 miles to the southeast on the Soviet side of the river is the nearest economic activity of any consequence. The Chinese side of the river in the immediate area is almost completely undeveloped. The roads and paths in the area appear to be used only by patrolling border guards.

After the ice breaks up, usually in mid-April, the river is used to a limited degree for navigation, principally

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by Soviet vessels. After the breakup this year, the matter of control may become academic because a good portion of the island will probably be under water and access to what remains will be difficult. The Soviets have already made public reference to the flooding and the "disappearance" of the island in what could be a first step toward easing the situation.

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